

**Interview with Marion J. Ransell-Dobbins
conducted by Linda Byrne for the
Providence district History Project Providence Perspective**

Linda: Today is January 21, 2008, I am Linda Byrne at Supervisor Smyth's office and for the purpose of the Providence Prospective I am talking with Marion Dobbins. Good afternoon.

Marion: Good afternoon. My name is Marion Dobbins and I am a 6th generation Virginian, actually 7th generation Virginian and 6th generation to Fairfax County resident. I was born and raised in Merrifield all my life, my grandmother lived behind the Fairfax Hospital where it's now the Pine Ridge Park and I grew up on an acre of land right next to the First Baptist Church of Merrifield at the intersection of Gallows Road and Ransel Road which was named after my father Freddie Ransel. And how we came to be in this area is really a tale of two families, the Lee's and the Collins.

The Lee family to me is very interesting because it starts with Lucy Lee in 1840 who was a mulatto born free in Upperville which is Fauquier County; she subsequently had a daughter named Betsy Ann Lee and she was born in 1823, she was born free and she was a mulatto. Betsy Lee had a son James E. Lee and he was born in 1840, he was born free and he was a mulatto. And the reason that I know they were born free is because I found their registration papers. And what happened was whenever you were either given your manumission papers you were born free and the only way you can be born free is if your mother was free.

Then, you would have to register at the courthouse every three years and you got your certificate to be a free Negro. And so I have found that in the Fauquier County records the certificate of free Negroship for James Edward Lee, Betsy Lee and Lucy Lee. It looks like Lucy went to the courthouse in 1840 with Betsy and register James and James' older brother Charles.

James lived in Faquier County until about 1863 and then I find a letter that was written on behalf of General Johnston of the Confederacy and it's written to the Marshall at Faquier County and the letter says that they need to round up all the free Negro males that have their own shoes, their own blanket that are of good mind and sound body and they are to march them through Manassas into Centerville because there is going to be a battle and they want them to dig entrenchments there.

So in this letter there are names of Negroes they want them to get and one of the names is James Edward Lee, and James Edward Lee was Betsy Lee's son and Lucy Lee's grandson and he was my great, great grandfather. So he's there in 1863 digging in entrenchments in Centerville.

Then I find a letter that he (James Edward Lee) wrote in 1919 that talks about how he came to Falls Church in about 1865 right after the war ended he found the place a mess. He said that the railroad ties were wrapped around trees, lots of disarray and chaos going on but he and his brother Charles settled in the Falls Church area, which is now part of Falls Church City, I think. And they acquired land, they opened up a bank account, I found James Lee on the Friedman's bank records, so he did have a bank account. He got about 12 acres, he's also paying taxes every year to the county for things like a sewing machine, a clock, so that tells me that he knew how to tell time. He was becoming prosperous enough to be able to afford a sewing machine and to pay taxes on it.

He's learning to read and write because there were some white people that came down and was teaching, as he said, the Negroes to read and write. And he became what they considered a Gentleman Farmer; that's what his nickname was. He owned horses that he would hook up to his buggy and he would become like a chauffeur for people who were having weddings and things like that.

Supposedly he had a pretty big Victorian house with a wrap around porch. He was one of the first blacks to have indoor plumbing. Every year they

had a beautification contest and James Lee would always win for the most beautiful yard. When James died he willed his property to his children and his youngest son was named Russell and Russell subsequently gave property to the county to open up the first Negro school. And that school then became James Lee Elementary which is now James Lee Community Center which sits on Annandale Road in Falls Church.

Now, it's interesting that James Lee was also supposedly the son of General Robert E. Lee. And what I did as a historian, I wanted to see if the time, his date of birth and the travels of General Robert E. Lee would put him in the region of where he could have sired James Lee and yes, it does. He had relatives in that Upperville Fauquier County area and I also met another gentleman who's a professor, I forget the name of the University in up State, New York, and his relatives are from Upperville and he wrote a book about his great, great grandfather being also the son of Robert E. Lee. So there is a lot of those type of things going around as far as oral history.

James Lee had a son who then had a son Arthur Lee and Arthur had a son – I'm sorry James Lee had a son Arthur Lee and Arthur Lee had a son Avon Lee; and Avon Lee is my grandfather.

And Avon Lee married Myra Collins and Myra Collins was the daughter of William Collins, Jr., and William fought in the Spanish American War and after he fought in the Spanish American war he was with Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders. He was in, I think it was Troop 10 Company C or something like that; and they were there at the battle of San Juan Hill. The money that he got from that he purchased land in 1905 and I went to the courthouse and got copies of the deeds.

He purchased about 22 acres in total and he and his other relatives moved into what we call the Pines. And The Pines is located right behind Fairfax Hospital on Woodburn Road, which is now Pine Ridge Park. My grandmother lived there with Avon Lee and they had children. And from that marriage they had my mother who was Eulalah Elizabeth Lee, Ransel

was her married name, and they lived there until probably around 1964 or 1965.

I remember as a child that my grandmother was very upset because she had always been taught by her father that you must have land, that is how you are good citizen, that is how you create wealth, that is how you get somewhere in life is through land. So it was really important for him to have land and to be able to will land to his children and he gave 5 acres of land to my grandmother when he died and the other siblings got acreage. And when the county came in about 1964 1965 they told my grandmother she had 90 days to get out because they were going to build a school there.

And from research what I see is that it was because they were desegregating the schools and someone in the county, I guess, had the bright idea that they needed more schools I don't know. And we did have a Washington Post reporter who did a story on this and I have the article, I'll email it to you. What she found out was there were three different tracts of land that they were considering to put this high school on and they said that two were the Negro properties that didn't have much value to it so they would probably be easier to get.

So I guess that is what the decision was to go ahead, but what they basically did was break up an entire African American community. It is totally gone.

And I watched my grandmother basically just cry herself to death because this property and this land was so important to her. I mean every Sunday we would go to her house and there would be 30, 40, 50 people there. After church we would all go there to eat, we would gather around the piano, we were very musical. Her brother had gone to school, and he lived right next to her or a little ways down the road from her, I guess, and I remember going in his house. I remember his house to me reminded me of the White House cause it was white outside and it had these black wrought iron lanterns in the front and when you walked through the door you would

go to the left and that was his music room. And he had a Baby Steinway piano you know, he had a full size harp, he had a bass fiddle. I mean he could play every instrument. And that's what I grew up with, was absolute surrounded by music. We sang Handel's Messiah, we didn't really sing a lot of gospel we were more into the classical classic type things.

Actually my grandmother's brother, Guy Collins, he was one of the first musicians that helped orchestrate the first segregated choir in Fairfax County in the Providence District. He also wrote music, four and five part harmony and published some books. We really grew up in that kind of environment, filled with love, and lots of woods and we played and just really had a good time. And then when that all came to a halt when they took the land away. And I could see that my grandmother never really recovered from that.

The only place they could buy a house was in Williamstown and Williamstown is right off Rt. 50 on Williams Drive and you know what's really interesting to me is that Williams Drive, when you turned onto it was a gravel road until you got to the white section of Williams Drive and that was paved. Now understand that this is the 60's and 70's that we are talking about so it was just really interesting that there was this definite line between black and white, even then.

My grandmother, although they had owned the land in the Pines and didn't have a mortgage and would have been very comfortable in their senior life, then had to go and mortgage to get money enough cause the county did not pay them enough to build another house. They had to mortgage to get land and built another house and they lived at Williamstown until they died and then the family sold the property. But, it really did break up an entire community because it wasn't just the Collins there were other people that lived in that area too, but it was really a community.

And that's one of the things that really spearheaded my decision to become a historian is because it really saddens me, especially when I go through

Merrifield and I don't see anything of what I remember. I remember the post office being in back of the IGA store. The IGA store was where Mattress Discounter is now at the intersection of Lee Highway and Gallows Road. I remember walking in there and even though the owners were white, I think it was the Parker's, they were really always nice to me and always gave me ice cream and I remember going back to the butcher because that is where you got your meat. It wasn't like Safeway, it was like a dry goods store and then you'd go in the back and I remember our Box number was PO Box 152, because we didn't get regular mail service because we were considered rural. And that's gone. I remember Johnson's Auto Body and I think that's gone and I remember Berra's garage, which was the gas station that you went to get gas and got your car fixed. I stood in front of there to catch the bus to go to high school and all those places are gone now. So, it's really been a mission of mine to make sure that I document the old buildings, the histories, the stories of all the things that I grew up with.

The First Baptist of Merrifield is the African American church in Merrifield I think it's been there since about 1876 - something like that. Don't quote me on that Aunt Dolly would better know about that because Aunt Dolly was the Clerk of the church so she's really the historian of the church.

But my family the Collins and my dad's family the Ransell's which the road is named after really are the ones that were instrumental in building that church. And that church the land was bought from the Bradley's and the stipulation was that as long as there was a church on there they were in good standing. They could never sell it for anything else and they could never have a cemetery there.

Well, the Black people of Merrifield didn't have any place to bury their dead so what they did was, William Collins and some other people in the Pines donated land and the Son's of Liberty created a cemetery there in the Pines which is still there now. The Smithsonian came in and found graves and

they redid it because when the county took the property for the school they promised the families that they would keep the cemetery up, and they didn't.

But in the, I guess probably in the, 80's or 90's Malcolm Richardson, who is a wonderful historian in Fairfax County and I think he just died maybe a year ago, he was working with Smithsonian and he helped find my relatives. And so it was really neat because I met him at a doctors office and then I didn't know and I started talking to him and he says, "oh my goodness, I found your relatives", I'm like oh my goodness it's so exciting. So, that was neat and now we can actually go down into the cemetery and we can honor our dead and put flowers on, because after we left the Pines in the 60's it was so grown up over there and those snakes and everything you couldn't go down in there. But in the 80's and 90's when they did redo the cemetery we were able to go down there, but there again the Blacks had to do for themselves, they had to have their own cemetery.

And that's the interesting thing I think about Merrifield and the Pines is that we really had our own; we really took care of each other. If somebody needed, they got. If a family needed, I remember at church services they would say we are gonna hold a special collection because sister so and so needs to buy her medicine. And everybody would put money in so sister so and so could get their medicine, or so and so needs food, so We're gonna get you food or we're gonna get you clothes or whatever. The churches, at least Merrifield and I know the other churches in the area; the black churches were really like your social settings. You went there for everything.

My vacations were because of the church. I remember you could only go to specific places because it was segregated, but I knew that every summer we were gonna go somewhere with the church. So we'd charter a bus and we would all you know and that was our vacation. So the vacations weren't just family vacations they were but community vacations, which I don't think you have that anymore. That's one of my fondest memories is always

knowing that sometime in July or August we're getting on a bus and going somewhere to the beach and it is interesting because we always went north. I never went to a Southern beach until I was an adult. I take that back, when I was 12 we did charter a bus and went down to Orlando so that was kind of neat. But otherwise - I was born in 1959 and so I'd say in the 60's or the early 70's it was mostly we would go to Atlantic City or we'd go to Wildwood, New Jersey, cause you just didn't go south.

That is the Collins part of it, and then Myra Collins marries Avon Lee and that is the James Lee part of it so you have two families, you have James Lee and then you have William Collins and their children get together and they create a life in the Pines in the Providence District and that's where my memories are from, that's where I grew up.

I mean I went to school at Fair Hill Elementary, but before then I entered school in 1964 and that's when the schools were being desegregated. I am fairly light skinned and my mom was really worried that I wasn't going to fit in and so she did put me in private school for two years.

So I went to Holy Trinity Lutheran School on Rt. 50 and then when I got into the second grade that's when I went to Fair Hill. And then from Fair Hill I went to Pine Ridge and then went to Luther Jackson when it was an intermediate school.

It's real interesting, if you go to Luther Jackson Intermediated School on one side of the hall they have the bathrooms in the classrooms and the counters are lower, I think because they had elementary kids. I think Luther Jackson was 1st through 12 or something like that.

My mom only had a 6th grade education because Fairfax County did not go any higher than 6th or 7th grade for its' African American kids, they had no high schools here in the area. So when she finished that, and actually I have a picture in here of her elementary school because when I was

growing up in Merrifield the school was still standing right across from the house that I grew up in. And I remember going over to my friend's house who was living in the school, they had changed it to a house and I remember her back door had Room 2 on it. And I was like why does your back door have a room number on it? Don't you know where you live? So that was kind of strange that she only had that chance to go to 6th or 7th grade.

Now what she was allowed to do they had night classes at where Boyd's Piano School, Piano building is. That was the Odd Fellows Hall and the Son's of Liberty, and so whenever they had special things they would do there at the Odd Fellow's Hall, or they would have night classes there so she learned how to do hair, and cosmetology and things like that.

With her sisters they were younger than her so when they were coming up Fairfax County paid tuition for them to go up to Manassas Industrial School. So they rode from, I think they walked from the Pines to Tree Mount Garden, which is right below Merrifield and took the bus to Manassas every day.

Linda: I understand that was about an hour to and hour and a half process on the bus.

Marion: Yes, I didn't do this but it was and my understanding there was no heat on the bus when they got to the school there was no heat in the school. But that school is a real interesting place, I mean it was started by an ex-slave Ginny Dean who couldn't read or write but yet she opened up this school. And she started going around the country trying to get money for this school in Manassas. And Carnegie heard her and donated \$20,000 to help build one of the main dormitories there so it has a really rich history and my aunts are very proud to go there.

One of my aunts graduated from there and went on to Nursing School; Aunt Dolly did a whole lot of musical type things and one of my aunts

graduated valedictorian so they had some good memories there.

The relatives that came along after that generation, I think Fairfax County opened up Luther Jackson in 1957, I think that's when it was, and so they all went there for elementary to high school. And then when they desegregated, like I said I went to private school for kindergarten and first grade and then second on up. But I remember thinking when I was in Fair Hill that there was a law you could only have two black kids in a class, cause it's like there was never any more than two black kids if three in a class. So I use to think wow, that's all that you could have in a class; must be a law or something, isn't that strange?

Linda: Oh, that is.

Marion: And still it was really, it could be a very unstable time, I guess I remember my cousins were a little bit older then me and they were going to Oakton High. And then I went to Oakton too. But I remember when Oakton first opened up there was some race riots and they had police in the hallways.

And I remember that if you were black; if you wanted to try out for cheerleading and things like that you probably weren't going to get picked.

I had some good experiences at Oakton cause I went into the acting and drama department and I really loved my teacher there and so he was very good to me. But there still wasn't this connection that the other kids had when they went to Luther Jackson like there were teachers who were really going to push them to excel.

I think it was a time when people really didn't know what to do. And I think my generation kind of fell through the cracks. There wasn't a whole lot of okay you need to do this to get to college do this. I mean my mother had a 6th grade education; she didn't know what SAT's were, she didn't know how you funded to get your kid into school.

I didn't even know that because my father was a World War II veteran. I could have gone to school for free, nobody told me so I got married, had kids and then went to back to school and paid for it out of pocket. But that's where total disconnect and falling thru the cracks there was a lot of that during that time period.

Linda: This is very interesting. I love the warmness of the community and how everyone, because having talked to your Aunt Holly Hill you still get that today that she is still offering that it is still a part of your community.

Marion: You know what I find is really interesting is that a lot of people move into the county and they'll say Black People were in Fairfax in the 60's? And I'm like black people like helped build Fairfax County and even though the rest of Fairfax County can be very transient the African American community is not. We are basically; you know you've got your 6th and 7th generation Fairfax County Residents the churches that are here have been here forever.

And we're all like sister churches. They're all belong to the Northern Virginia Baptist Association – it's 52 Black Churches and they own land in Gainesville and they all come together in August in Fellowship and they help each other. I remember my mom saying there wasn't a whole lot that they could get maybe outside of their community. But within their community they had everything they needed. If you needed shoes, you were gonna get them, if you needed a car ride you were gonna get it, if you needed a book, you were gonna get it.

I remember her saying that when she was living in the Pines that when her grandfather William Collins, he worked at the Washington Gas Company and when he would come home on Fridays after he got his money from his pay check he would always stop by the Salvation Army and buy her a book and he would bring her a book and he use to say you have to learn to read, you have to learn to read. And every dollar you make you save 10 cents

and so here my mother then has me and she would always set me in this little kids rocking chair and go “you have to learn to read, and she would read to me and I would read to her.

And I still have that rocking chair and I set my daughter in that rocking chair and tell her you have to learn to read. And now I have a grandbaby that’s a year old and, your going to learn to read in this rocking chair because it’s a tradition. And I remember my mom got that rocking chair from the S&W Green Stamp Company; so there are a lot of good memories.

A lot of community and people really caring about each other and helping each other. Even with building First Baptist I remember on the week ends my dad would be over there laying brick and there was a construction company called D.A Foster Construction right there on Gallows Road and he was white and they needed a crane to lift the rafters up so they could finish building the church and D.A. Foster’s like whatever you guys need. And when the snow would come, and believe me it snowed more then than it does now, talk about Global Warming I can’t believe this D.A. Foster would send his bulldozer over and he would bulldoze out the church yard so we could have church service, so it is this real community you know.

Linda: Tell me a little more about the individual stores and restaurants and places that were here in Merrifield when you were growing up.

Marion: What I think is interesting is that my mother use to work at Lee Furniture Store which is at 29211 and I found an ad, I went through the Washington Post and Times and found some ads for stores and Lee Furniture Store, which I had never heard of until about a year ago and it sits right next to the Blue Cross Animal Hospital. And if you notice it says 29211, but it doesn’t really give you any directions so that kind of tells me maybe there wasn’t a whole lot of stores around here then. But this was between 1955 and 1962 and it was owned by two brothers, Raymond Smith and Alfred Smith and my mother worked there and my cousin

worked there and the interesting thing about this is that he was going to school at Luther Jackson and he said that they had Vocational Education and the Smiths had him come there after school for his Vocational Education and taught him how to redo furniture.

So you see that a lot of the communities even though it's segregated – you know this white store owner is allowing African Americans to come in and learn a trade and he said that there was no segregation as far as his business. If you needed to buy furniture as long as you had the money, that's fine you come in here and you buy the furniture. I don't remember that store because I was born in 1959 and they closed in 1960 or 1961 so I was too young.

The stores that I remember at the intersection of Lee Highway and Gallows Road was the IGA which is where the Mattress Discounter is and like I said the back of the IGA was where the Post Office was and I remember it was like wood paneled and it had the little door that you go up to talk to the Post Mistress, and her name was Miss Davis and to me she looked like she was about 4'1" - I mean she was the shortest woman I had ever seen, a really nice lady and they had the little bars in front of it, I mean just straight out of Mayberry RFD.

You didn't get your mail from a carrier you had to go into the Post Office and our Box was 152, but before you could get to the Post Office in the back of the IGA you past their little lunch counter, now it wasn't really into operation when I was going in there it in the early 60's but I assumed that before then you could to in there and you could get something to eat or whatever. But they had the glass counters there with the penny candy and I remember buying the candy necklaces and things like that for a penny or 2 cents or something like that. They had your sodas, they had your ice cream you know those kind of things.

To buy meat was a little bit different because you really went to the butcher. You went to the back of the IGA and ask if he could ground me up

a pound of hamburger and he'd do it or he'd cut some steak and put it in the white paper and put some string around it and then you'd go up to the cashier and check out. It was more like a dry goods store too; they had a few vegetables and things like that.

But we grew our own vegetables, my Dad had, we had an acre of land but as I say probably about 1/3 of it was vegetables so we always had our own corn, and watermelon, and peas, and cabbage and all those things. We had a beautiful yard they were really into their yards. You know they wanted the nice lawns, flowers, and azaleas and tulips.

My dad worked at Ft. Meyer forever he had worked at the Army Map Service before World War II and then he went into World War II and after that he to Ft. Meyer and he stayed at Fort Myer and I think he was a GS 9 when he retired. Which was pretty good for an African American back then he retired about 1976 I think?

My mom worked at the Lee Furniture Store in Merrifield and then she worked at the Barnes and Kimball's store at Fairfax Circle and then when I started going to school she just stayed home and took care of me and the house and my dad worked. But, we had a pretty good life style, I remember we had two brand new 1959 Oldsmobile's sitting in the yard, we had a nice house and because my mom worked at the furniture store we had nice furniture we had carpet, indoor plumbing. I had never known not having indoor plumbing, now my cousins who were born like 1955 or so they remembered living in houses that didn't have indoor plumbing, but I don't.

I was born in Alexandria Hospital; my mom had twilight birth which is a little strange, I mean that's expensive stuff back then. You know that's where they put you to sleep. I mean they don't do that anymore; but that is kind of unique because most African American women either had the child with a midwife or they would go to Freedman's Hospital. One of my cousins who's two years older than me, there wasn't any hospitals here because Fairfax Hospital wasn't open I don't think until 1960 and you couldn't really go to Arlington if you were black to have a baby to Arlington Hospital, you had to go to Washington, but her mom couldn't make it so

she had to have the baby in the hallway at Arlington Hospital. But yet what's interesting is that my aunt worked – another aunt worked at Arlington Hospital; she was one of the first black nurses there she worked in labor and delivery.

Linda: Oh, wonderful.

Marion: Yeah. Some of the other stores, I think it was Fairfax National Bank across from the IGA. There was a gas station, the Johnson's Auto Body Store has always been there, more ornate than it was before it closed, I mean Mr. Johnson just had everything on there. It was an icon. I use to just love to just watch that. At Christmas he would decorated it with all the lights and D.A. Foster who was behind the IGA Store right on Gallows Road, he was the contractor that helped the church with the cranes and stuff; every Christmas he would put a big Star of Bethlehem up on the top of his crane and I remember I always knew it was Christmas because that star would be out there and it was really nice. He did that every year.

There was a smaller nursery there before it became Merrifield Garden Center, and actually my dad knew the gentleman who started the nursery first, he really wanted him to go into business with him but he didn't want to do it. And I think it was the nephew of Bill Hurst who owns Merrifield Garden Center now. But most of it was there was a lot of woods. Luther Jackson has always been there. Those are about the main ones that I really remember.

Linda: Was there a movie theater in the area?

Marion: There was a drive in; there was not a multiplex or whatever. And I remember when I was young I couldn't go there because it was segregated. And that's right - being the Levitts Shopping Center and before there was a Levitts Shopping Center I could sit on the edge of my parent's yard and I could see the movie screen I just couldn't hear it. But I remember when they desegregated it I wanted to go so bad and they said I was too young. So I didn't get to go there until I was a teenager and by then it was dilapidated and they sold it.

The place we went to for the movies was the Jefferson in Falls Church. And we'd go there and I think my first movie was Mary Poppins. But my mom and them would catch the bus down to Washington and mom and that's what she was saying my mom would say that they had their own because even though they couldn't go to things out here, they could go to D.C. and they had their own world. They had the Howard Theater and things like that so they did their own thing.

I remember my mom talking about shopping in D.C., which most people don't realize - she was like we couldn't go into Woodward and Lothrop period, black folks just couldn't do that. But, if they went into J.C. Penney and I am not sure if it was Hecht's, definitely know J.C. Penney they could shop in the bottom but they couldn't go to the top floors and they couldn't try on anything, like they couldn't try on a dress, or a hat or shoes or anything. You just had to guess, cause you weren't going to try it on and you couldn't bring it back.

So - and I remember I must have been maybe 2 or 3 years old or 4 maybe, I mean really young I just remember going into D.C., and going into this place to get something to eat and we got a hot dog but we had to stand on the sidewalk to eat it. And I couldn't understand why we had to stand on the sidewalk to eat it, but now you know. But that's kind of strange to me, you know. And my other aunts talk about how they couldn't go to places like Mt. Vernon Historical Park you know cause black people just couldn't go in there, you couldn't go into none of them really. That's why they did the National Zoo, I think they do like a - oh I know they couldn't roll Easter Eggs at the White House so what they did was the black people would go to the zoo on Easter Monday and they would have their own and do what ever they needed to do. But most people don't think about that.

Linda: No, having grown up in the white community in Washington, D.C. myself, you don't realize until you have friends after things were integrated and you would have black friends that you'd realize what was going on.

Marion: Yeah, but you know it's like my dad Freddie Ransel who lived in the Pines, remember I said there were other people that lived in the Pines not just the Collins. He was born in 1908 so he was relatively old when he

had me like 50 years old; but he told me that when he was a kid they would grow their own vegetables there in the Pines, Providence District and they would take the vegetables by horse and cart to Georgetown and they would sell their produce down there.

And in the winter they would cut pine trees down, and that is why it was called the Pines because there were so many pine trees, they would cut pine trees down and take them down there and sell them because there were so many huge mansions down there they needed large trees. Well these trees out here were huge. So they would cut them and put them on the wagons and take them down there and sell them. And, they would make wreaths and things and that's how they made their money.

Linda: In interviewing Dolly Hill your aunt she was saying, that I think it might have been her father, it was someone had a horse that when they were coming back from selling that would be a long day and you would have to be on the road by horseback to get into D.C. from here would take you hours and then coming back it would be dark and you would be tired and fall asleep and the horse find its way home.

Marion: Yeah, yeah, I know it and then, you know my grandmother who was about my Dad's age she would go down to the market too, to sell things in Georgetown she said there was one restaurant that they could go to in Georgetown, that anybody could go to called Everybody's Restaurant because anybody could go in there and eat and she thought that was so neat. She was like yeah I can go in there and eat and it doesn't matter.

But for my grandmother to travel from the Pines to D.C., she went into Dun Loring because there was a trolley car I think there was a trolley car station there near where the Dun Loring Elementary School is. And so she took the trolley car but when my mom was coming up she would walk from the Pines to Tree Mount Gardens, do you know where Tree Mount Gardens is? (Linda: No I don't) It's right there you know where King David Cemetery is, (Linda: yes.) right you know where all those shops are just before you get there that is where Tree Mount was, I guess they had restaurants also but that is where the bus stop was too. So, you would catch the bus there and go into D.C.

My mom worked at Arlington Hall during the war and she worked at night and she said it was real interesting because a lot of celebrities would come thru and eat, like James Cagney and she said that one time he came through and she was like are you James Cagney and he goes oh no that's my brother and she goes I know you are James Cagney and he goes no, no, no it's my brother.

And her other sister Myra she worked at the Pentagon and Dwight Eisenhower had his own private dining hall and one day his waitress got sick and they only let the light skin black cute waitress' work in the Officer's Hall. So my aunt was cute and light skin so they had her go in there and I guess he liked the way she looked and served, whatever and then he made her one of his wait staff and she said she got to meet like Lana Turner, and Clarke Gable and just all kinds of people. My mom said that when the Japanese surrendered she said all the Waves and Wacs or whatever they called the women that were in the services. And the guys they all got so drunk and she was getting like \$50 tips and that was a lot of money, can you imagine? Yeah, so she said that was a good night for her.

Cause they would go to D.C., and buy shoes for like 95 cents or something like that you know. So it sounds like they didn't really buy a whole lot, to me it sounded like there was not a lot to buy here like as far as clothes you really had to go like into D.C. to get things like your shoes or the other place was Clarendon and Arlington they would go to J.C. Murphy's a lot down there too. That is why it is so surprising to me that there was a furniture store there that nobody seems to remember at all. I mean I have talked to people and they are like I can't remember that store and how can you not remember a furniture store in Merrifield.

Linda: We will have to do some more research and find out. What other kinds of things do you think that would be interesting?

Marion: I don't know if she showed you these pictures – this is a lot of stuff – like: this is William Collins, Sr., and this is in the Pines and this is William Collins, Jr., this picture is actually dated 1896, after the Battle of the Santiago Bay and that's him right there.

This is Woodburn Road and the Park Pine Ridge would be over here and the hospital here and this is the way I remember it and this is the way my mom remembers it and it really didn't change much.

And this remember I told you my uncle's house that looked like the White House, this is when they were building it and this is the front of it when they were building it. But when

I remember it, it had wrought iron black chains and that's why I thought was the White House. But he had a harp and a Steinway Piano and everybody took piano lessons; all of the girls took piano lessons. I want to dance - no, you have to learn how to play and sing. So I took piano lessons and voice lessons and this is the property how it looked this is in the 40's I think.

This is the mule that Aunt Dolly, this is Jenny, so they were farmers this is their farming and the land.

Linda: These are wonderful photos.

Marion: And that's Aunt Dolly and her sister. Did Aunt Dolly tell you she was Miss Manassas?

Linda: Yes.

Marion: And that she got to meet Mary McCleod Bethune.

Linda: No.

Marion: She got to present her with flowers because she was Miss Manassas. That's my mom and this is her other sister the one that was valedictorian. Here is one of the church too.

Linda: Some of these look familiar, from your aunt.

Marion: Now this lady here was Anne Moffy and Anne Moffy lived in the Pines and she and William Collins, Sr. they became sister and brother, I don't know if they are biological or not, but she was the midwife and she would do midwifery or whatever for both black and white. But she also wrote poems and did plays and she wrote this poem called "Shouldn't" and it goes

"Has you ever seen the liken of children's nowadays?
Taint no shouldn't cause it ain't got no shouldn't ways,
bringing it on a twisting down the street,
you better step aside cause they day it's gonna steps right on your feet"

so it goes on and on so this poem she wrote my grandmother learned it, my grandmother taught it to me and I used it for my audition for my first play I was ever in at a Oakton High School and got the part.

Linda: Wonderful.

Marion: So I mean and she wrote it like in 1910 or something. So I thought that was kind of.

Linda: oh, that is

Marion: This is hog killing time in the Pines. So this is just pictures of people. I don't know if she showed you a picture of the church, Aunt Dolly. The First Baptist Church sit right on Gallows Road and that is the old church.

Linda: And the church that is there now?

Marion: It was right next to it. What they did was to raise money.

This is a real community because this is the Snack Shack that would have been right in around here in the lot of the church, this is the same church and it was around in here somewhere and after church they would sell sodas, and cookies and cakes and that's how they raised the money to build the new church.

And this is my yard actually, so my yard was here and then the new church is there and the old church was right there and this tree was second base when we played kickball.

See this picture here? That was my mom's elementary school. That was the Merrifield Negro School and it actually went from 1st to 7th grade and that is where my mom went, it was two rooms and I remember my mom saying that it would be so cold when they would get there to school and the first thing the boys had to do was to make a fire.

Some of the people in the community you know they couldn't take baths or anything and they were dirty, not my mom though because my grandmother wasn't going to have that.

But the teacher wasn't just teaching kids, she really had to feed them because some of these kids hadn't eaten, some of them hadn't washed, some hadn't brushed their teeth, combed their hair so it was really more than just, it was Social Services and that's one of the things that the churches became. The churches were really your Social Services; it was your social center because you couldn't join the golf club, come on who had money for that and you were black you weren't going to join that. So that became the church that was the churches role.

And my grandmother would walk from the Pines to Merrifield or send Uncle Vernon, the son and bring biscuits and hot ham or whatever to her younger children everyday to eat and she'd always make more because some of these kids hadn't eaten. That's the way she was nobody ever went hungry around my grandmother.

This is the choir at First Baptist. And that's Aunt Dolly, that's my mom and this is Uncle Guy who had the house that I though was the White House that played the and actually this is a pipe organ, we had a pipe organ in this church. And that's what we grew up with. We did plays, we sang things like Handel's Messiah, you know stuff like that; he really didn't do much gospel type.

This is me, so this is about 1965 and you can see that the school is still there.

This is the Pines in the 60's when I was growing up just before they took the property.

Linda: I am struck by the openness and the lack of all the buildings there now.

Marion: I know, I mean there were actually trees. Gallows Road was kind of scary at some places because there were trees on both sides and I remember it just seemed so dark and I use to think, oh my goodness are we going to make it. And that's the thing that in a way hurts me, it's like yes, I know development is good, but I don't want people to forget Merrifield, I mean that's where I grew up you know and I just feel that it is being forgotten.

When I listen to people talk about oh I 'm going home, I am going back to my hometown and I'm like I don't have one it is going away and if somebody doesn't stop and take the time to document the buildings and talk to the people, and there are so many rich stories you know, you can't forget that.

My Mom, they would go to Griffin Field, which was before RFK was built so this is a picture from the colored section. This is a good picture; I like this cause it really talks about life. You know when they would go on road trips, they couldn't stop at restaurants so they would stop on the side of the road and have picnics so you are going to have your fried chicken and hard boiled eggs cause those are things that are going to last, you're not going to have your casseroles.

This is my mom, this is probably Atlantic City.

And this one's good too, this is my grandmother's taxes.

This is grandmother Ransel and Jenny Ransel lived in the Pines with the Collins and that's her taxes, I also have her ration coupons from the war for sugar.

Linda: This is personal property tax \$1.50.

Marion: Did she pay it?

Linda: Real estate, land tax \$3.18 and that was for 2 ½ acres on Fairfax Road the valuation was \$150 and the county tax was \$3.18 and this was due in 1941.

Marion: This one is 1942. What I have over there are letters that my dad and I think his brother wrote to his mother from World War II.

Linda: 1944. The papers are in very good shape. If you don't mind we'll make some copies of these. (Marion: Sure.) Nice handwriting - "From your son Private Freddie A. Ransel".

Marion: I remember when the county came to the church and said you need to name the road that the church sits on and so they said well we're going to name it Ransel Road after Freddie Ransel and my dad was like you can't name it after me because I haven't really done anything worthy to have a road named after me. We said yes you have, you fought in the war you did whatever. You know it takes a whole lot of no names to make the world go around, it's not everybody's going to be famous so I thought that was kind of humbling.

Linda: Yes it was. That was great because having roads named after people will bring back, because other people coming in that are new will wonder why the street was named.

Marion: Yes, but he was a pillar in the community, he helped people and like I said he built the church, he was a carpenter by trade and his brother was a plumber and I remember you know we had well water, because everybody had well water, you didn't have sewer and plumbing lines.

And our well went dry one time and I remember his brother had to come out and re dig our well out. I was just like what are they doing in the ground like that, you know. I remember we had the bucket you could pull up and we had indoor plumbing and we could get water from the faucet too. But before then in the 40's when my dad first bought the property he bought an acre for \$500 he didn't have indoor plumbing but when I was born they did, but he still had the bucket there where you could pull it up or whatever. But a lot of people in the black community of Merrifield and the Pines some of them still had outdoor outhouses you know. I was scared to go into an outhouse because I didn't grow up with those but even my grandmother in the Pines I remember when they put the septic tank in for her to have indoor plumbing so that scared me when they were doing that. And that's sad because as soon she got indoor plumbing that's when the county came and took her property.

Linda: I thank you very much this has been wonderful.

Marion: If I think of anything else I will pass it on to you.

Linda: Great.